

Empathy & Service to Others



Empathy defined. In order to appreciate the role empathy plays in our lives, we first need to have a clear understanding of what empathy means. Most times, we confuse empathy with sympathy; that to be empathic means agreeing or relating to the feelings another person has regarding a given situation or individual.

Empathy means being able to understand the needs of others. It means that you're aware of their feelings and how it impacts

their perception. It doesn't mean you have to agree with how they see things; rather, being empathic means that you're willing and able to appreciate what the other person is going through.

Why it matters. There are many benefits that derive from making time to understand what those around us need, as opposed to what we perceive is required. When we take the time to understand the needs of others, we can provide them with the support they require to move ahead, to deal with the challenges or issues that might be holding them back from achieving their goals. Empathy builds a sense of trust, therefore strengthening relationships which lead to great collaboration and improved productivity.

What it takes to be empathic. Empathic people listen attentively to what you're telling them, putting their complete focus on the person in front of them and not getting easily distracted. They spend more time listening than talking because they want to understand the difficulties others face, which gives those around them the feelings of being heard and recognized.

Developing empathy. One way to develop our empathy skills is to pay more attention to both the verbal and non-verbal cues that are part of everyday communication. By doing this it will help you to shift the focus from the story that is in your mind to the actual message that is being presented.

Paul says that, *"If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.* 1 Corinthians 12:26

Service to Others

What does service to others mean? Service to others, to me, means being unselfish, it means doing something for someone else without expecting any reward or gain. Service to others, to me, also means helping people out when they cannot complete a task by themselves.



From Me to We. When you serve, you discover that often the most important things you have to offer are not things at all. You start to uncover the full range of resources at your disposal – your time, presence, attention – and recognize that the ability to give stems from a state of mind and heart, a place much deeper than the material. Inspired by the possibilities this opens up in every moment, you begin to discover humble opportunities to serve – everywhere.

Gratitude. When you acknowledge the fullness of your life, you can manifest a heart of service in any situation. In that sense, service doesn't start when we have something to give – it blossoms naturally when we have nothing left to take. And that is a powerful place to be. We begin to play our part – first, by becoming conscious of the offerings we receive, then by feeling gratitude for them, and finally by continuing to pay forward our gifts with a heart of joy.

Self-Transformation. Any time we practice the smallest act of service – even if it's only holding a door for somebody with a full heart that says, "May I be of use to this person" – that kind of giving changes the deeply embedded habit of self-centeredness. In that brief moment, we experience other-centeredness. That other-centeredness relaxes the patterns of the ego, a collection of unexamined, self-oriented tendencies that subtly influence our choices. This is why no true act of service, however small, can ever really be wasted. To serve unconditionally in this way takes practice and constant effort. But with time and sharpened awareness, we begin to brush against the potential for transformation that is embedded in every act of generosity.

Serve to honor our profound interconnection. Over time, all of those small acts, those small moments, lead to a different state of being – a state in which service becomes increasingly effortless. And as this awareness grows, you inevitably start to perceive beyond individualistic patterns: Each small act of service is an unending ripple that synergizes with countless others.

What each of us can do, on a personal level, is make such small offerings of service that ultimately create the field for deeper change. The revolution starts with you and me.

For even the son of man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many. Matthew 20:28

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